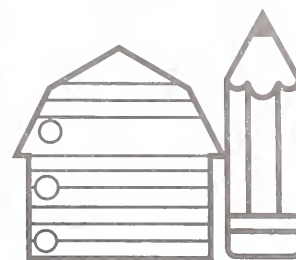


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Ag in the Classroom

United States
Department of
Agriculture



Notes

A bi-monthly newsletter for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to help students understand the important role of agriculture in the United States economy. For information, contact: Shirley Traxler, Director, Room 317-A, Administration Bldg., USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250-2200. 202/720-5727 --

FEB/MAR 92
Vol. 8, No. 2

Michigan Institute Supports, Excites Teachers

"The underlying philosophy of Michigan's Summer Institute is simple," says its director, Eddie Moore of Michigan State University. "We are here to help teachers ... so they can help their students."

Clearly, it's working. Two years ago, the first Institute enrolled 13 teachers. When they returned to their schools full of enthusiasm and great ideas, it prompted more teachers to attend the second Institute. Now in its third year, the program has become so popular that a second session has been scheduled this summer for teachers in the Detroit area.

"Farmers in the rural areas have done a tremendous job of reaching out to schools in their area," says Julie Chamberlain, who also serves as a state contact for AITC in Michigan. "But we simply don't have farmers in downtown Detroit and Grand Rapids to do the job. We feel the Summer Institute is a wonderful way to meet the needs in the urban areas."

The Institute, sponsored jointly by the Michigan Farm Bureau and Michigan State University, begins with an examination of the National Education Goals introduced by President Bush and the nation's governors. "We want to make sure teachers understand the relationship between what we'll be doing at the Institute and national trends in education," says Moore, who also serves as one of the state contacts for AITC in Michigan.

Teachers who attend the Institute learn about agriculture and how it can be integrated into all the basic academic subjects. They also learn about science and technology, global/international education, international trade, the economics of the food and fiber system, Michigan's

food and fiber system, new and emerging career opportunities, and Michigan natural resources.

The Institute emphasizes the thematic approach to teaching — bringing the real world into the classroom and incorporating an interesting topic into math, science, social studies, and language arts. "Michigan, like most states, was concerned about improving test scores," Moore says. "This thematic approach excites students and makes school learning more related to the real world. If learning is fun, then a lot of learning will take place."

Teachers who attend the Institute receive scholarships provided by agricultural commodity groups, local agribusinesses, and various university departments. A local grocery store chain even sponsored a reunion for Institute alumni, held during homecoming weekend at Michigan State.

The Michigan AITC program is working closely with educators who serve the state's gifted and talented students. "To make sure our agricultural industry remains competitive in a global economy, we must attract our nation's best and brightest," Moore says.



Editors's Note

In this issue of Notes is the agenda and registration for the 1992 National Ag in the Classroom Conference. The conference will be in Orlando, Florida, June 6-9, 1992. The agenda is packed, so we hope you will come early and stay late. Please read the instructions on the registration form carefully and return your registrations to me as soon as possible.

Forest Service Materials Help "Treeture Teachers"

The average American uses seven trees a year. Four people's annual paper use weighs as much as a large car. Together, Americans use over one-and-a-half billion trees annually, including paper, wood, and other products made from trees.

Because environmental awareness is directly linked to the need to plant and protect trees, Earth Day and Arbor Day will be celebrated together this year on April 21. To help teachers and students learn more about trees and the vital role they play in our natural environment, USDA's Forest Service has developed a new set of teacher materials that will be appropriate on Arbor Day ... or throughout the year.

The materials introduce students to characters called Treetures™. These fantasy characters, who first appeared at last year's Arbor Day celebration, promote ecological awareness in young children. The Treeture program, a cooperative effort of the Forest Service, the American Forestry Association,

and Trees for the City, a project of the L'Enfant Trust, emphasizes the importance of trees to the survival of our planet.

The Treetures are a community of characters dedicated to tree planting and teaching the value of trees to young children. By combining education and entertainment, the Treetures help children understand the need for trees, how they function, and the importance of protecting and caring for our natural environment.

From the Rooters, who encourage trees to grow, to the Sunbeam Team, who direct sunlight to the leaves so the tree can produce oxygen, the Treetures offer a whimsical look at a serious subject.

The world of Treeture creatures was created by Judith H. Blau, a children's author and product designer, who has volunteered her services and characters to the USDA Forest Service for the America The Beautiful Tree Program.

Teachers can receive a free packet of materials that can bring the Treetures to life. Treeture costumes can be rented for special events. Contact Pamela Speka, USDA Forest Service, 201 14th St. SW, Washington, DC 20250; (202) 205-0976.

*Treetures™ representing
different aspects of tree
growth and care can
promote ecological edu-
cation for young children.*

Spotlight

Ag In This Classroom Helps Raise Test Scores

Combine an enthusiastic teacher, a supportive principal, and the Ag in the Classroom program and what do you have? A new way of teaching that has excited students ... and improved their standardized test scores.

Two years ago, an administrator in the Lansing Public Schools asked fourth-grade teacher Mary Schultz if she wanted to attend a new summer institute. "He mentioned that it had something to do with agriculture," Schultz recalls, "and that I would be representing the

students see that agriculture has to do with real life," Schultz says.

Every experience leads to another. Students write about their farm visit, for example, and then read each other's writing. They hold candles to eggs and then graph what they see. "The children love to go out and look at the farm, at the machinery, the crops, the animals," says Jack Keyes, the principal of Northwestern Elementary School and himself a graduate of the Michigan Summer Institute. "What we've done is to use all of those kinds of things as motivation for students to read and write. It's all so logical; I can't imagine why we didn't do it sooner."

Lansing is surrounded by farms, so Schultz expected that some of her students would have a basic understanding of agriculture. "Unfortunately," she has learned, "no one ventures any farther than McDonald's or the movie theater. So we are raising an entire generation of students who know almost nothing about how their food is produced."

For example, the first grade teacher, who attended the second summer institute at Schultz's urging, installed a large cardboard barn in her classroom. The barn was decorated with drawings of various farm animals. "Still," says Schultz, "when she asked the children what the building was, they said it was a garage."

When the year-end results from the Stanford Achievement Test came in, Schultz found another benefit to her year-long effort to bring excitement and learning into her classroom. Scores jumped dramatically — including one child who rose from the ninth percentile in reading and math to the 56th percentile. "I really believe my enthusiasm paid off," Schultz says. "We're going to watch the scores this year, but I attribute this dramatic rise to the enthusiasm that our children had for learning. That's directly related to the Ag in the Classroom program."



Using thematic teaching that integrates agriculture year-round, teacher Mary Schultz has seen her students' achievement levels soar.



Lansing Schools. Other than that," she says, "I had no idea why I was going."

It didn't take her long to figure it out. From the minute she arrived at the Michigan Institute for Ag in the Classroom, Schultz began to see opportunities for incorporating agriculture into her teaching. "I have always used a thematic approach to my teaching, bringing the outside world into my classroom," she says. "Ag in the Classroom opened my eyes to a whole new world."

The kickoff for the year came in September — National Ice Cream Cone Day. Not only did students enjoy eating an ice cream cone, but they also visited a nearby dairy farm to see where the ice cream had come from. While they were there, the class saw two cows give birth. "That was the best way to help our

Exhibit, Video Build Ag Day Excitement in Indiana

Ag Day offers an opportunity for agricultural organizations to sponsor a local event that will attract attention ... and educate children. That's what's happened in Indiana, where each year an exhibit titled "Food From Farm to You" attracts thousands of students and teachers.

The exhibit at the Indiana State Fairgrounds reaches approximately 2,000 fourth grade students from the Indianapolis Public Schools. This year, the Ag Day committee will keep the exhibit open one evening and will invite the general public to attend.

The Ag Day display uses a favorite food — pizza — to help students learn about how foods move from farm to table. "Pizza includes all four food groups," says Pam Bright of the Ag Day Committee. "And, of course, it's a food that kids love!"

Students visit four stations — one representing each food group. Each station includes learning activities that involve all five senses.

In the grain exhibit, for example, students have a real hands-on experience as they put their hands into bins of winter wheat. In the exhibit devoted to fruits and vegetables, an actor wearing a tomato costume sings and

dances. In the dairy area, students see a mobile milking machine and have a chance to pull and stretch string cheese. They learn about meat as they watch a volunteer grinding cuts of meat to make sausage, a favorite pizza topping.

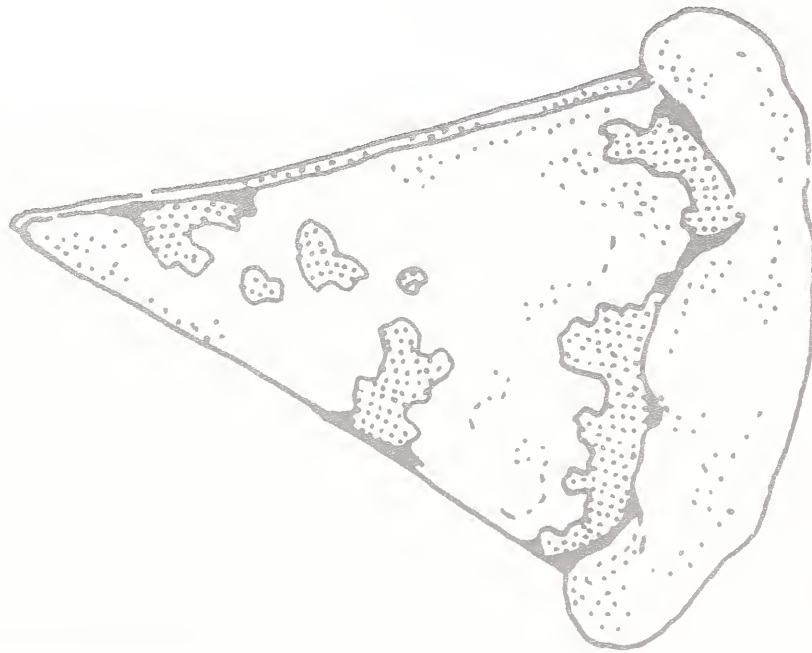
To tie everything together, each student receives a piece of pizza and a small cup of milk. While they munch their pizza, students watch as FFA members introduce them to some of the animals found on a farm.

For many students, the Ag Day tour is the first exposure they have had to agriculture. "One little boy didn't even know the difference between a horse and a cow," Bright says.

"Food From Farm to You" does not focus only on agricultural production. To help students see how food moves from farm to their homes, the exhibit also features a large semi truck.

This year, to encourage other Indiana counties to launch a similar Ag Day celebration, the Ag Day committee has developed a promotional video that gives an excellent overview of the "Food From Farm to You" exhibit. The video is intended for use with county Ag Day committees that want to offer a similar field trip in their own county. The committee also developed a "how-to" guide.

For more information on how Indiana celebrates Ag Day, contact Pam Bright, Education Coordinator, Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture, 150 West Market, Suite 414, ISTA Center, Indianapolis 46204.



Forgetful Kangaroo Rats Reseed The Nevada Desert

Anyone who has ever forgotten a set of car keys can sympathize with the plight of kangaroo rats in Nevada's Great Basin. But, say USDA researchers, the kangaroo rat's forgetfulness is an important part of the desert ecology.

"At night, when it's cooler, kangaroo rats gather native grass seeds and dig shallow holes to store them," says William S. Longland of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"But sometimes they forget where they stash them," he says.

One of the rat's favorite foods is Indian ricegrass seed. Over 100 years ago, Paiute and Shoshone tribes collected the seed for food—as do the furry, tan kangaroo rats today. Caches of Indian ricegrass seed forgotten by the animals appear to be the primary source of new ricegrass seedlings in the desert, says Longland, an animal ecologist at the Landscape Ecology of Rangelands Research Unit in

Reno, NV. The unit is operated by USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

"We're just beginning to understand the complex interaction between native plants and animal communities in the desert," says James A. Young, research leader of the Reno Lab. "In this desert environment, anything that gives a forage plant a survival edge can add food for livestock and wildlife, plus vegetation as a buffer against erosion."

Scientists at the Reno station found earlier that seeds of ricegrass germinate better if they have been inside the rat's cheek pouch. "Why this happens isn't clear," Longland says, but he has found two types of beneficial fungi in their cheek pouches. One of them, saprophytic fungi, may promote seed germination, while the other, mycorrhizal (that's right—3 R's) fungi, help plant roots get nutrients.

"If the size of the kangaroo rat population in an area and the soil characteristics are known, it would help tell how well Indian ricegrass would grow when planted for forage," Longland says. Another payoff: being able to predict how well the environment can recover from a range fire.



Nevada's forgetful kangaroo rats help reseed the desert with ricegrass, ARS researchers have found.

Understanding The Many Faces Of Agriculture Through Quality Education

National Ag in the Classroom Conference
June 6, 7, 8, 9, 1992

Peabody Hotel
9801 International Drive
Orlando, Florida 32819
Telephone: 407/345-4520

Saturday, June 6:

8 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Set up exhibits
1:00 - 6:00 p.m.	Registration (The Challenge Box)
4:00 - 5:30 p.m.	Regional & Canada Meetings (Optional)
6:30 - 9:00 p.m.	Banquet - Welcome to Florida Bell-ringers

Two minute ideas that you can adopt to strengthen your AITC program

Sunday, June 7:

8:00 - 9:00 a.m.	Newcomer's Meeting
9:00 - 11:00 a.m.	State Contacts Grant Writing Seminar
Afternoon	Local Farm and Agricultural Industry Tours

Monday, June 8:

8:30 - 9:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
9:00 - 9:10 a.m.	Opening Remarks/Instructions
9:10 - 9:20 a.m.	The Plight of Grady the Cow
9:20 - 9:40 a.m.	Motivational Speaker
9:40 - 10:50 a.m.	Global Agriculture Panel
10:50 - 11:05 a.m.	BREAK
11:05 - 11:35 a.m.	Agri-business Supports Ag Literacy
11:35 a.m. - Noon	BREAK

Noon - 1:00 p.m.	LUNCH Canada Update
1:00 - 1:30 p.m.	BREAK
1:30 - 3:00 p.m.	Roundtables (See Yellow Sheet in Registration Packet)
3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	BREAK
3:15 - 3:30 p.m.	Food, Land and People Update
3:30 - 3:35 p.m.	Instructions
3:35 - 4:10 p.m.	Think Tank
4:10 - 4:15 p.m.	Return to Conference Room
4:15 - 4:50 p.m.	Reports
5:00 p.m.	Parade of the Ducks
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Reception
Evening	Dinner on your own

Tuesday, June 9:

8:00 - 8:30 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
8:30 - 9:15 a.m.	Michigan Teacher
9:15 - 10:00 a.m.	Concurrent Workshops 1.) Strategic Planning 2.) Instructional Technology, Ag Topics, and Curriculum Objectives 3.) Volunteer Empowerment 4.) Classroom Implementation 5.) Classroom Implementation 6.) Canada
10:00 - 10:15 a.m.	BREAK
10:15 - 11:00 a.m.	Repeat Concurrent Workshops
11:00 - 11:05 a.m.	Return to Conference Room
11:05 - 11:25 a.m.	Grady's Delivery
11:25 - 12:25 a.m.	BREAK
12:25 a.m.	Board Buses For Epcot Center The Land Exhibit (For Conference Participants Only)
12:40 - 2:45 p.m.	Visit the Electronic Forum and The Land Exhibit
2:45 - 3:00 p.m.	Return to the Peabody Conference Ends

REGISTRATION

National Ag In The Classroom Conference
June 6-9, 1992

Peabody Hotel
9801 International Drive
Orlando, Florida 32819
Telephone: 1-800-PEABODY

Name: _____

Address _____

Phone: () _____

Important notice: You make your hotel reservations at the Peabody. The low rate of \$58 per night, single or double occupancy, applies three days before and three days after our conference. Be sure to mention Ag in the Classroom when you make your reservations.

Notice: Ground transportation from Orlando Airport to the Peabody by taxi is approximately \$22.00 each way or by any of several shuttle services at approximately \$20 round trip.

REGISTRATION FEE is \$125.00. Make check payable to Ag in the Classroom and return with this form, by April 22 to:

Shirley Traxler
Room 317-A, USDA
Washington, D.C. 20250

TOURS: (no extra cost)

Sunday, June 7, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Tour agricultural enterprises

Yes _____

No _____

Tuesday, June 9, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

The Land Exhibit - Epcot Center

Yes _____

No _____

DISPLAY SPACE is available at no cost. Yes _____ please reserve exhibit space for me.

I will need _____ table(s); _____ electrical outlet; _____ wall space; _____ other
 Please specify:

Date of your arrival _____

Date of your departure _____

The individuals listed here are key reference persons in each state. If you have any questions, want to make reports, or need more information about your state's Ag in the Classroom program, contact the following:

Alabama

Ms. Jane Alice Lee
2101 Bell Road
Montgomery, AL 36117
205-272-2611

Ms. Brenda Summerlin
Dept of Ag & Industries
PO Box 3336
Montgomery, AL 36193
205-261-5872

Alaska

Mr. Ted Berry
Mat-Su College
University of Alaska
PO Box 2889
Palmer, AK 99645
907-745-9752

Arizona

Ms. Sue Cafferty
4341 E Broadway
Phoenix, AZ 85040
602-255-4456

Mr. Robert Wilson
Arizona Farm Bureau Federation
3401 E Elwood
Phoenix, AZ 85040
612-470-0088

Arkansas

Dr. Philip Besonen
GE 310
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
501-575-4270

California

Mr. Mark Linder
CA Foundation for AITC
1601 Exposition Blvd FB 13
Sacramento, CA 95815
916-924-4380

Colorado

Ms. Helen Davis
Colorado Dept of Agriculture
700 Kipling St. #4000
Lakewood, CO 80215-5894
303-239-4114

Ms. Bette Blinde
28276 WCR 15
Denver, CO 80550
303-686-7806

Connecticut

Mr. David Nisely
Dept of Agriculture
165 Capitol Ave
Room 234
Hartford, CT 06106
203-566-3671

Dr. Alfred Mannebach
University of Connecticut
249 Glenbrook Rd
Storrs, CT 06269-2093
203-486-0246

Delaware

Mr. G. Wallace Caulk, Jr
Delaware Farm Bureau
233 S Dupont Highway
Camden-Wyoming, DE 19934
302-697-3183

Florida

Mr. John McNeely
FL Dept of Agriculture and
Consumer Services
LL-29 The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32301
904-488-9780

Georgia

Ms. Donna Reynolds
Georgia Farm Bureau
PO Box 7068
Macon, GA 31298
912/474-8411

Hawaii

Mr. Ken Kajihara
Dept of Education
49 Funchai St, J-306
Honolulu, HI 96813-1549
808-373-3477

Idaho

Ms. Kathie Johnson
Idaho Dept of Agriculture
PO Box U
Twin Falls, ID 83303
208-736-2188

Illinois

Ms. Ellen Culver
Illinois Farm Bureau
Field Services Division
1701 Towanda Ave
Bloomington, IL 61702-2901
309-557-2219

Indiana

Mr. Robert Book
IN Institute of Agric.
Food, & Nutrition
101 W Washington St #1320E
Indianapolis, IN 46202
317-637-1600

Iowa

Ms. Fredi Juri
IA Foundation for Ag Awareness
PO Box 364
Indianola, IA 50125
515-961-2548

Kansas

Ms. Sharon Tally
124 Bluemont Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506
913-532-7946

Mr. Tim Christian
SCS 760 S Broadway
Salina, KS 67401
913-823-4570

Kentucky

Ms. Faye Lowe
Kentucky Farm Bureau
9201 Bunsen Pkwy
Louisville, KY 40250-0700
502-495-5000

Louisiana

Ms. Barbara Langley
LA Farm Bureau Federation
PO Box 95004
Baton Rouge, LA 70895-9004
504-922-6200

Maine

Mr. Cliff Shaffer
Room 101, Winslow Hall
University of Maine
Orono, ME 04469
207/581-3206

Maryland

Ms. Laurie Green
Department of Agriculture
50 Harry S Truman Pkwy
Annapolis, MD 21401
301-841-5894

Massachusetts

Mr. Wayne Hipsley
211 Stockbridge Hall
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003
413-545-2646

Michigan

Dr. Eddie Moore
410 Agriculture Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
517-355-6580

Ms. Julie Chamberlain
Michigan Farm Bureau
7373 W Saginaw Hwy
Lansing, MI 48909
517-323-7000

Minnesota

Mr. Alan Withers
MN Department of Agriculture
90 W Plato Blvd
St Paul, MN 55107
612-296-6688

Mississippi

Ms. Helen Jenkins
MS Farm Bureau
PO Box 1972
Jackson, MS 39205-1972
(Street: 6310 I-55 N
Jackson, MS 39211)
601-957-3200

Missouri

Ms. Diane Olson
Missouri Farm Bureau
PO Box 658
Jefferson City, MO 65102
314-893-1400

Montana

Ms. Betty Jo Malone
4538 Palisades Council
Billings, MT 59106-1341
406-652-6161

Nebraska

Ms. Ellen Hellenich
NE Farm Bureau Federation
PO Box 80299
Lincoln, NE 68501
402-421-4400 ext 2002

Nevada

Mr. Ben Damonte
12945 Old Virginia Rd
Reno, NV 89511
702-853-5696

New Hampshire

Ms. Donna Grusell
NH Farm Bureau Federation
295 Sheep Davis Rd
Concord, NH 03301
603-224-1934

New Jersey

Ms. Cindy Efron
NJ Dept of Agriculture
CN 330
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-8897 or 633-7463

New Mexico

Mr. E. G. Blanton
NM Farm & Livestock Bureau
421 N Water
Las Cruces, NM 88001
505-526-5521

New York

Ms. Betty Wolanyk
111 Kennedy Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-5901
607-255-8122

North Carolina

Ms. Janice Shepard
NC Farm Bureau
PO Box 27766
Raleigh, NC 27611
919-782-1705

North Dakota

Ms. Kaye Effertz
ND Dept of Agriculture
State Capitol
Bismarck, ND 58505
701-224-2231

Ohio

Ms. Judy Roush
911 Ohio Departments Bldg
65 S Front St
Columbus, OH 43266-0308
614-466-3076

Oklahoma

Ms. JoDahl Theimer
OK Department of Agriculture
2800 N Lincoln Blvd
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
405-521-3868

Dr. James Rutledge
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater OK 74078
405-744-5390
FAX 405-744-5339

Oregon

Ms. Kay Shidler
Agr-Business Council
1200 NW Front Ave., Suite 290
Portland, OR 97209-2800
503-627-0860

Pennsylvania

Ms. Beth Moore
5399 Gutner Rd.
Chambersburg, PA 17201
717-375-2639

Rhode Island

Ms. Carol Stamp
1 Stamp Place
South County Trail
Exeter, RI 02822
401-942-4742

South Carolina

Hugh McClimon
922 Rutledge Bldg.
SC Dept of Education
Columbia, SC 201 Clemson
803-734-8426

South Dakota

Ms. Gail Brock
SD Farm Bureau
PO Box 1426
Huron, SD 57350
605-352-6731

Tennessee

Ms. Roberta Anson
Executive Director, AITC
PO Box 577
Pierre, SD 57501
605-224-0361

Texas

Mr. Bobby Beets
Tennessee Farm Bureau
Box 313
Columbia, TN 38402-0313
615-388-7872

Texas

Mr. Tad Duncan
Texas Farm Bureau
PO Box 2689
Waco, TX 76702-2689
817-772-3030

Utah

Mr. El Shaffer
UT Department of Agriculture
350 N Redwood Rd
Salt Lake City, UT 84116
801-538-7104

Vermont

Dr. Gerald Fuller
University of Vermont
Agric. Engineering Bldg
Burlington, VT 05405-0004
802-656-2001

Ms. Megan Camp
Shelburne Farms
Shelburne, VT 05482
802-985-8686

Virginia

Ms. Jane Futch
VA Farm Bureau Federation
PO Box 27552
Richmond, VA 23261
804-225-7544

Washington

Ms. Julie Sandberg
WA Dept of Agriculture
P.O. Box 3924
Lacey, WA 98503
206-586-1427

West Virginia

Mr. William Aiken
WV Farm Bureau
Rt 3, Box 156-A
Buckhannon, WV 26201
304-472-2080

Wisconsin

Mr. Dennis Sabel
Wisconsin Farm Bureau
7010 Mineral Point Rd
Madison, WI 53705
608-833-8070

Wyoming

Mr. Gene Paxton
833 Brae Rd
Douglas, WY 82633
307-358-5828

Ms. Sue Sherman
Executive Director WAITC
WY Dept of Agriculture
2219 Carey Ave.
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-638-7355

Micronesia

Dr. Ruben Dayrit
CTAS/College of Micronesia
Kolonia, Ponape
FSM 96941
691-320-2738

Guam

Mr. Victor Artero
College of Ag & Life Sciences
University of Guam
Mangialo, Guam 96923
617-734-2575

Virgin Islands

Mr. Eric Bough
Dept. of Economic Development
& Agriculture
St Croix, VI 00850
809-778-0991

Virgin Islands

Mr. Otis Hicks
PO Box 804
Christianstad
St. Croix, VI 00821-0804
809-773-0758

Puerto Rico

Mr. Dave Heilig
USDA/SCS
Caribbean Area State Office
GPO Box 4868
San Juan, PR 00936
809-498-5206

Ag in the Classroom Notes

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